24: 'Labour' (1693; from the 1661 Commonplace Book)

We ought to look on it as a mark of goodness in God that he has put us in this life under a necessity of labour: not only to keep mankind from the mischiefs that ill men at leisure are very apt to do; but it is a benefit even to the good and the virtuous, which are thereby preserved from the ills of idleness or the diseases that attend constant study in a sedentary life. Half the day employed in useful labour would supply the inhabitants of the earth with the necessaries and conveniences of life, in a full plenty, had not the luxury of courts, and by their example inferior grandees, found out idle and useless employments for themselves and others subservient to their pride and vanity, and so brought honest labour in useful and mechanical arts wholly into disgrace, whereby the studious and sedentary part of mankind as well as the rich and the noble have been deprived of that natural and true preservative against diseases. And 'tis to this that we may justly impute the spleen and the gout and those other decays of health under which the lazily voluptuous, or busily studious, part of men uselessly languish away

a great part of their lives. How many shall we find amongst those who sit still either at their books or their pleasure, whom either the spleen or the gout does not rob of his thoughts or his limbs before he is got half his journey? And becomes a useless member of the commonwealth in that mature age which should make him most serviceable, whilst the sober and working artisan and the frugal laborious country man performs his part well, and cheerfully goes on in his business to a vigorous old age. So that when we have reckoned up how much of their time those who are intent on the improvements of their minds are robbed of either by the pains and languishing of their bodies, or the observance of medicinal rules to remove them, a very favourable calculation will show that if they had spent four, nay I think I may say six hours in a day in the constant exercise of some laborious calling, they would have had more hours of their lives to be employed in study than in that languishing estate of a broken health which the neglect of bodily labour seldom fails to bring them to.

He that exempts half his time from serious business may be thought to have made no scanty allowance for recreation and refreshment, and if the other twelve hours of the four and twenty are divided betwixt the body and the mind, I imagine the improvement of the one and the health of the other would be well enough provided for. I make account that six hours in the day well directed in study would carry a man as far in the improvement of his mind as his parts are capable of, and is more I think than most scholars that live to any age do or are able to employ in study. For as I have said, those who at their first setting out eager in the pursuit of knowledge spare as little as they can of their time to the necessities of life to bestow it all upon their minds, find it at last but an ill sort of husbandry, when they are fain to refund to the care of their decayed body a greater proportion of their time than what they improvidently robbed them of. Six hours thus allotted to the mind, the other six might be employed in the provisions for the body and the preservation of health. Six hours' labour every day in some honest calling would at once provide necessaries for the body and secure the health of it in the use of them.

If this distribution of the twelve hours seem not fair nor sufficiently to keep up the distinction that ought to be in the ranks of men,

let us change it a little. Let the gentleman and scholar employ nine of the twelve on his mind in thought and reading, and the other three in some honest labour, and the man of manual labour nine in work and three in knowledge. By which all mankind might be supplied with what the real necessities and conveniency of life demand in a greater plenty than they have now, and be delivered from that horrid ignorance and brutality to which the bulk of them is now everywhere given up. If it be not so it is owing to the carelessness and negligence of the governments of the world, which, wholly intent upon the care of aggrandizing themselves, at the same time neglect the happiness of the people and with it their own peace and security. Would they suppress the arts and instruments of luxury and vanity, and bring those of honest and useful industry in fashion, there would be neither that temptation to ambition where the possession of power could not display itself in the distinctions and shows of pride and vanity, nor the well-instructed minds of the people suffered them to be the instruments of aspiring and turbulent men. The populace, well instructed in their duty, and removed from the implicit faith their ignorance submits them in to others, would not be so easy to be blown into tumults and popular commotions by the breath and artifice of designing or discontented grandees. To conclude, this is certain, that if the labour of the world were rightly directed and distributed there would be more knowledge, peace, health, and plenty in it than now there is. And mankind be much more happy than now it is.